



GET TO KNOW NEW NWA FACES



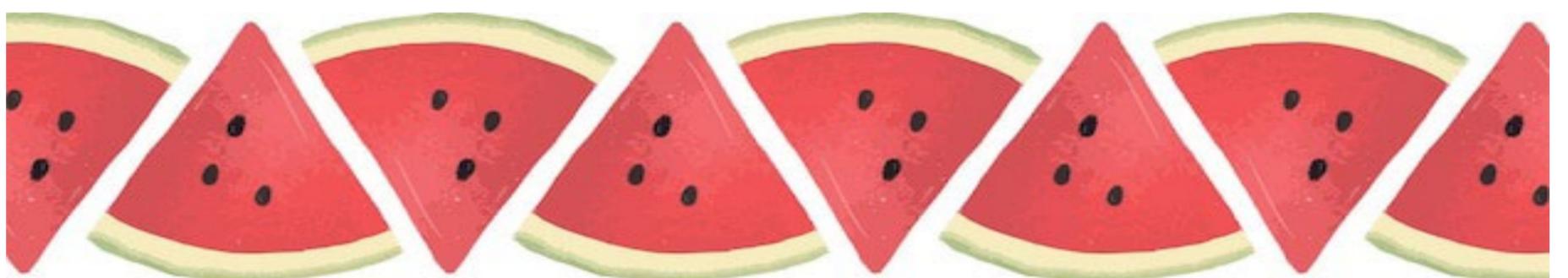
Jordan Carter



Bob Gibson



Queen Jules



CORRCHOICE

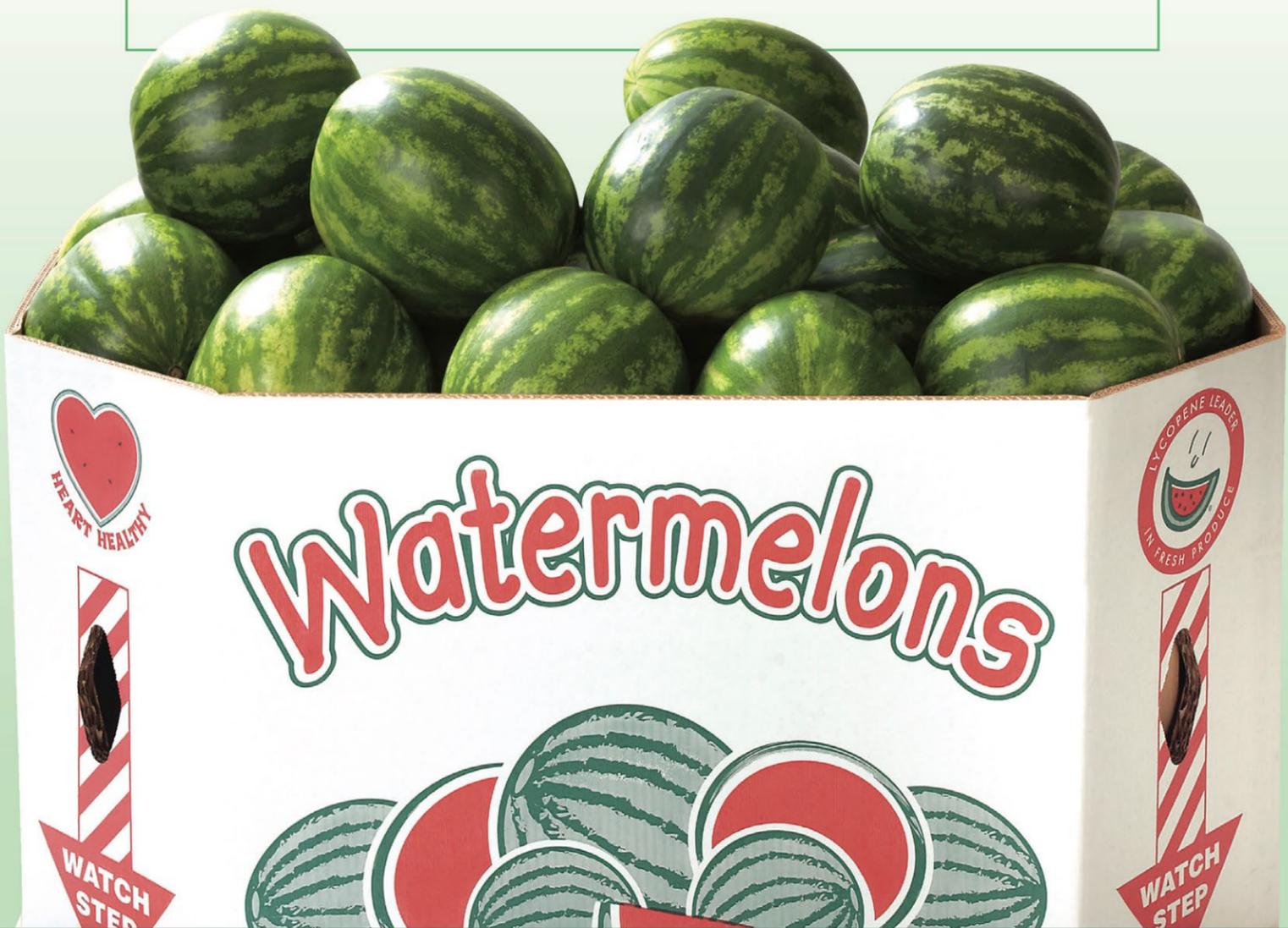
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Welcome to Spring, here on the Vinline, and in your fields!

For the staff team at NWA, a sigh of relief is breathed as we have returned home from a successful (and fun!) convention, and are looking forward to the fruits of the domestic watermelon season that is coming. And so it goes- as we move past this exciting and busy part of our year, and we look forward to the next.

In this issue of the Vinline, we'll look forward to some of the exciting things that are coming, like new research that NWA is funding that takes a new look at how to solve an old problem, and a look at how our technology companies are trying to make a difference in our fields by finding ways to reduce our labor costs.

As we look forward, we're also highlighting some things that are outcomes from our convention as well. Our convention in Scottsdale provided an opportunity to remember Ramon Murillo III, a member of our Arizona watermelon community who was lost too young in an accident years ago. Our members have come together from all over the country to support some of the good work that is being done in his memory. This truly is a Watermelon Family, that lifts each other up. It was palpable and inspiring at convention.

The cover of this magazine is an ode to another great outcome from convention: a new slate of leaders for this Association. While they may be familiar faces, each of the people on the cover of the Spring Vinline this year is someone who has accepted a challenge to step up and embrace the work of supporting this Association and industry. Queen Jules was our National Queen Competition winner and will serve as the National Watermelon Queen after a year as the Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen. Jordan Carter is our newest office of the association, stepping into the role of Vice President at convention. Bob Gibson has been a leader in this community for a long time, but we're so lucky and proud to look to his leadership as he takes the reigns as President of the Association.

We're proud to bring you this next edition of the Vinline. We're working hard for you as we move into the next domestic season. The staff (Monica, Tami, Kerri, and Queen Jules) and I are so grateful for the chance to be a part of this work for you and the watermelon industry.

Sincerely,

George F. Szczepanski
Executive Director
National Watermelon Association

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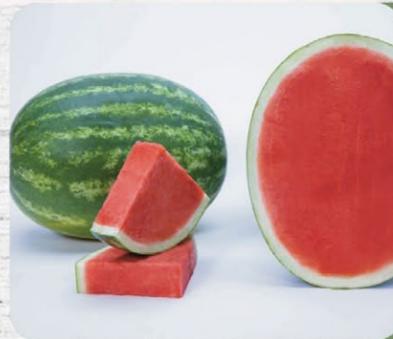
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National Report

Hello to everyone from the National Watermelon Association!

Queen Olivia wrapped up the 2023 watermelon season with multiple social media posts containing recipes, trivia, health benefits of our favorite fruit, and #MeetTheQueen. The Meet the Queen posts consisted of all the state watermelon queens and the chance for all the association members and the social media world to see and hear a brief introduction of each queen. **#1 & #2**

Immediately following the Christmas holidays, Queen Olivia began her “Convention Season” as it is referred to by everyone in the watermelon industry. NWQ Olivia attended the 2024 South Carolina Watermelon Association Convention. She was feeling lucky at the SCWA’s first night of events as she attended Casino Night with all the association members and the visiting MWQ Brielle, NCWQ Gracie and SCWQ Ansley. The next day NWQ Olivia enjoyed presentations, a delicious lunch, the annual auction, and then that evening she celebrated with the SCWA as they crowned their new SCWQ Kinlyn Hinson! Thank you again to the SCWA and Ms. Ann Bryant for hosting Queen Olivia and her promotions coordinator, Kerri L. Wiggins. **#3 - #5**

Starting the Georgia Watermelon Association Convention 2024 kicked off just right! NWQ Olivia was invited to a lady’s retreat where celebrity Chef Johnny Carino featured watermelon in every dish! Thank you to Mrs. Kendra Kennedy of International Paper for the invitation and the sponsorship of this event. Next there was the annual seed spit and a welcome reception where everyone in attendance got to meet the applicants for the GWA ambassador position. The following day Queen Olivia enjoyed lunch, speeches by the applicants, annual auction and was joined in all these events by the IWA Queen Abby and



continued on page 7



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National Report

melon as everyone enjoyed a beautiful banquet and the new 2024 GWA Brand Ambassador was selected. Welcome to your new watermelon family, Miss Maycey Kight! A HUGE thank you to the GWA for sponsoring Queen Olivia and her promotions coordinator to this wonderful weekend! #6-#12

NWQ Olivia met the MarDel Watermelon Association members in the Winners Circle at their Presidents Reception in Cambridge, MD where their 2024 MDWA convention was held. The NASCAR theme was enjoyed that evening by everyone there and was attended by Ross and Chad Chastain who promotes watermelon all year round on their platforms that include the NASCAR circuit! The next day, NCWQ Gracy and the MDWQ Brielle joined Queen Olivia in the seed spit competition, listened to various speakers, competition speeches, assisted in the annual auction, and laughed with everyone as we all enjoyed the 2024 Watermelon King Competition. After enjoying a beautiful banquet that evening, we all welcomed 2024 MDWQ Miss Karli Abbott! Of course, we thank the MDWA endlessly for their generous sponsorship of the NWQ Olivia and her promotions coordinator, Kerri L. Wiggins. #13-#24

NWQ Olivia's next stop for "Convention Season" was in Biloxi, Mississippi, at the 2024 Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Convention. Their Mardi Gras themed Presidents Reception was so much fun and enjoyed by everyone! The next day TWQ Amelia, SCWQ Kinlyn, GCWQ Jules all joined NWQ Olivia to listen to interesting speakers, a delicious lunch of fajitas, the seed spit, and the annual auction. Everything was a success! At the banquet, the competition ended where a new 2024 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen was crowned by GCWQ Jules. Congratulations to GCWA Tori Hobbs! Thank you so much to the GCWA for their sponsorship to make attending their convention possible! #25-#32



National Pictures

As National Watermelon Queen Olivia's reign comes to an end, she attended the annual National Watermelon Association Convention 2024 that was held in the beautiful We-Ko-Pa Resort in Scottsdale, AZ. Joining her was the Florida Watermelon Queen, Alyssa Armen-trout, the Georgia Watermelon Queen, Charley Lollis, Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen, Julianna Singley, Illiana Watermelon Queen, Abby Niehaus, MarDel Watermelon Brielle Carter, North Carolina Watermelon Queen Gracy Peterson, and South Carolina Watermelon Queen, Ansley Still.

The Presidents Reception was an amazing opportunity to visit with those that make NWQ possible. #33-#35

The Wild World of Watermelon evening event was enjoyed by everyone and the outdoors of Arizona in a beautiful outdoor venue with bull riding, BBQ, a band, and Ross Chastain stopped by for a quick visit. What a fantastic way to start the festivities! #36-#42

The final days of the 108th National Watermelon Convention began Friday with panel discussions, speech competition, annual auction, seed spit, a delicious dinner hosted by Mrs. Heather Raulerson of International Paper. On Saturday we all enjoyed the queen competition including promotion competition, impromptu question, written segment, and the live and video interview. Each state queen has done an incredible job representing the watermelon industry this past year and Queen Olivia was sad to close the door on this year but looks forward to what the Lord has in store for her future. She does desire to work in this industry after she completes her education. #43-#52

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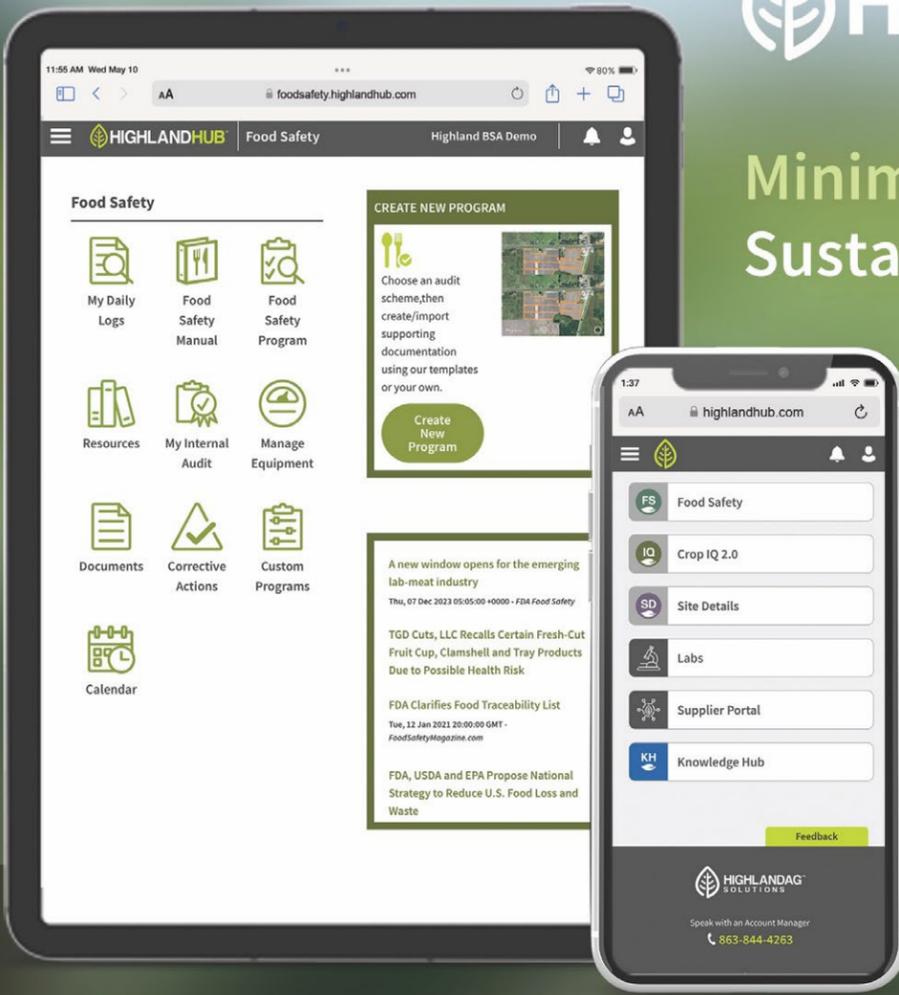




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National Pictures

After a phenomenal presentation by each contestant, Miss Charley Lollis won the title of Miss Jubilee by her watermelon sisters and second runner up as National Watermelon Queen 2024. Miss Brielle Carter placed first runner up and received a scholarship as well as flowers and a gift! Congratulations to our new National Watermelon Queen 2024 Miss Julianna Singley! She has also won a scholarship, received flowers and a gift from the National Watermelon Association. Prayers for a safe, successful, and fun year for our NWQ! #53-#61

Congratulations to NWA Executive Director, George Szespanski and the NWA entire team and volunteers for such a successful convention!



SAVE THE DATE!

February 19-23, 2025



Vineline *NWPB News*

Potential Promotion Board Assessment Increase Update

The National Watermelon Promotion Board met February 24th, in Scottsdale, AZ, in conjunction with the National Watermelon Association Annual Convention. Most notably, following a favorable report on industry support, the Board voted to move forward with a 3 cent per hundredweight increase to the Board's assessment level. This change means a total assessment of 9 cents per hundredweight. This amount is split between growers and shippers and paid in total by importers. The Board staff, overseen by the Executive Committee, will work to submit all necessary documentation to the USDA for the Rulemaking Process which includes a 60-day comment period. During the comment period, industry members are encouraged to share their opinions on the potential assessment increase. Look for more updates in the monthly NWPB Watermelon Update at watermelon.org/watermelonupdate.

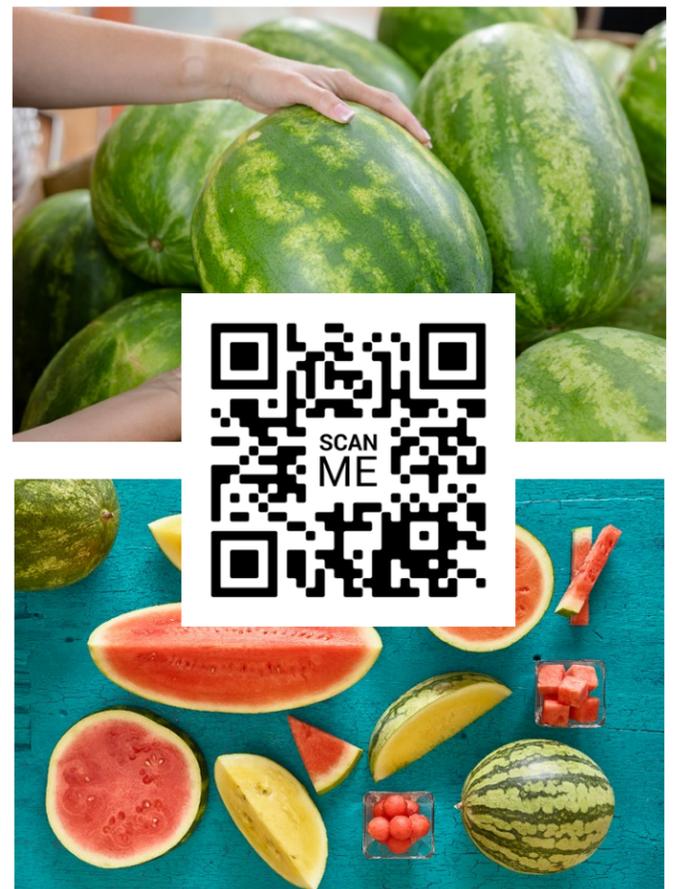
New Study Reveals Key Strategies for Merchandising Watermelon

The National Watermelon and Promotion Board (NWPB) announced the release of its latest consumer research and Marketing Guide designed to arm retailers and producers with information to make fact-based strategic decisions and build awareness of the opportunities within the watermelon category.

The new consumer study, "Watermelon Attitudes and Usage Research," delves into watermelon consumers' ever evolving attitudes, usage, and awareness. Building upon learnings from previous studies, the research focuses on better understanding the watermelon buyer and uncovers opportunities to help build consumer demand. The study examines the demographic segments of watermelon shoppers and reveals the key characteristics and drivers behind their purchasing decisions and consumption patterns.

Key Highlights from the study include:

- Watermelon Purchase and Usage- Dynamics Important purchase drivers that influence the decision to buy watermelon and how consumers use it.
 - o Watermelon is a planned purchase for most buyers. However, craving is the top reason for buying watermelon, whether the decision was made before or during the shopping trip.
- Perceptions of Watermelon- Consumers' attitudes about watermelon, its impact on their well-being, value, and nutritional knowledge.
 - o The study showed watermelon makes people feel happy, boosts their mood, and evokes feelings of nostalgia and comfort.
- Key takeaways of the watermelon buyer's demographic profiles, including their characteristics and personality traits.
 - o Generally, watermelon consumers have a positive outlook, value family, and enjoy being creative in the kitchen.



In addition to the complete research study, the NWPB has also released an inclusive Marketing Guide designed to assist retailers and industry shareholders in effectively reaching and engaging with watermelon core consumers. The guide provides a concise description and demographic profile of watermelon consumers as well as actionable strategies tailored to capitalize on the findings of the study, such as engaging, educating, and stimulating consumers' craving for watermelon. This marketing tool is a guide for successfully promoting and selling watermelon in today's competitive market.

"We are excited to share the results of our latest consumer research and its affiliated Marketing Guide with our industry partners," said Megan McKenna, senior director of marketing and foodservice for the NWPB. "Understanding consumer preferences is crucial for success in the produce industry in today's rapidly evolving landscape. We believe these resources will provide invaluable insights and opportunities to help retailers and producers thrive in the marketplace," said Mark Arney, NWPB executive director.

For more information on accessing these invaluable resources or about the NWPB's initiatives, please visit <https://www.watermelon.org/audiences/industry/research/consumer-research/>.



Vineline *Research News*



In this feature, we delve into one of the groundbreaking research projects supported by the National Watermelon Association (NWA) through our 2024 Research Grant Program. This initiative, generously funded by NWA, addresses head-on the challenges confronting watermelon growers in their fields. Its primary goal is to find solutions for the pathogens that plague our production.

Suppression of Fusarium Wilt of Watermelon by Mycoviruses



Dr. Akhtar Ali – The University of Tulsa

Traditionally, viruses have been considered mainly as pathogens that cause diseases in plants, humans and animals. However, in this project, we are exploring viruses of fungi called mycoviruses (which are not a pathogen of plants) but could be used as a beneficial microorganism to adversely affect fungal virulence with the objective of controlling Fusarium Wilt in watermelon.

Several studies have shown that mycoviruses had adverse effects on the growth and virulence of fungi that can be used as a biological control agent against fungi. Mycoviruses may not have visible symptoms on their host, but they effect the virulence of fungi, which shows how fungi can infect the host, and mostly illustrates itself as hypovirulence. Hypovirulence refers to decreasing the infectious symptom and growth of fungi on its plant host when the fungus is infected with a mycovirus.

Viruses can be used to control fungal diseases and have been a driving force in mycovirus research since the earliest days. Viruses in the family Hypoviridae associated with reduced virulence (hypovirulence) of the chestnut blight fungus, *Cryphonectria parasitica*, is a great example in fungal virology. This has been due in part to the severity of the chestnut blight epidemics in North America and Europe and early reports of hypovirulence-mediated mitigation of disease in European forests and successful application for control of chestnut blight. Recently, a more contributing factor has been the development of a hypovirus and *C. parasitica* experimental system that has overcome many of the challenges associated with mycovirus research.

Our project has the potential to identify various mycoviruses from *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *niveum* (FON) isolates, which could express hypovirulence against the Fusarium wilt fungus. Using mycoviruses on fungi provide an opportunity to utilize them as a biocontrol agent rather than using fungicides and/or fumigants, which are costly and can be hazardous to human health and the environment. They have the potential to effectively control Fusarium wilt of watermelon.

At the completion of this project, we hope to identify hypovirulent FON isolates that will have the potential to biologically control Fusarium wilt in watermelon. This hypovirulent culture can be grown and used to inoculate transplant watermelon seedlings which also distributes mycovirus infected isolate throughout the field. This strategy will enable us to formulate long lasting control strategies, which are environmentally friendly, efficient against a particular fungus, and economical.

In the last few years, studies of viruses that infect phytopathogenic fungi are gaining in popularity because of convincing evidence that mycoviruses are responsible for debilitation and/or hypovirulence phenotypes in many economically important plant pathogens. From agricultural perspectives, mycoviruses may contribute to sustainable agriculture as biological control agents. Presently, control of plant pathogenic fungi is a formidable task because of the lack of appropriate and cost effective disease control strategies. In addition to the health hazards and the risks to the environment, the use of fungicides and/or fumigants is often cost prohibitive.

In summary, the more we know about fungal viruses, the more we discredit the idea that all viruses are evil. Mycoviruses are indeed the good guys and hold great promise for exploitation as biological control agents and at the same time they are not pathogens of host plants.

Vinline *Tech News*

Technology Addressing Ag Labor Issues

By Tonya Reusser - NWA Contributor

As we know, the watermelon industry faces challenges due to high labor costs and labor shortages. Efforts by NWA and coalition partners to address this through changes to regulations and legislation have become the cornerstone of our public policy agenda, and a focus for discussion at our gatherings, but while gridlock in DC prevents movement at federal level, we need to look elsewhere to alleviate some of these roadblocks for watermelon growers.

The good news is that innovators are investing in creating technology that can provide hope for relief for this industry. New technologies and mechanization are providing advancements for the industry, bringing with them increased productivity, improved working conditions, and fostered employee loyalty and satisfaction. Some specialty crop growers are already reaping the benefits of mechanization and artificial intelligence, installing robots in greenhouses to space, prune, and fertilize plants. Growers are also adopting semi-automated technology like assisted steering. While robots seem like they may be far from our fields, there are inputs and technologies aimed at the watermelon industry as well. During the most recent annual convention, Gilles Mamane of Polyexpert shared how their film products could help reduce labor in the industry.

Additionally, other innovators are looking for ways to bring labor-reducing technologies to the watermelon industry. Mathieu Aspar of M.A.T. Harvesting also addressed the issue of labor cost, stating: “Labor shortages during harvest seasons pose significant challenges in agriculture. The physically demanding nature of tasks like watermelon or Cantaloupe picking exacerbates the issue. However, advancements in technology offer solutions. New technologies, like conveyor belt systems such as those made by Delecroix-Harvesting USA, streamline harvesting, reducing physical strain and increasing efficiency.



While some crops still require manual labor, mechanization plays a vital role in easing the burden. Implementing such technologies not only boosts productivity but also improves working conditions. This fosters worker loyalty and satisfaction, crucial for long-term sustainability.”

Despite the financial challenges posed by technological advancements, the industry has shown remarkable resilience and adaptability. Approximately 70% of participating farmers or various crops invested in automation in 2022, as per research conducted by Western Growers. This increased investment in agricultural robotics and mechanization, prompted by concerns about labor shortages, is a testament to the industry’s potential for growth and its commitment to overcoming obstacles.

Even as efforts to push for agricultural labor reform in DC are met with political gridlock, there is hope in the beltway for help with ag labor- through increased federal investment in mechanization and automation for the produce industry. The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (NWA is a steering committee member of this coalition) has worked with Congress to get a marker bill drafted for increased spending on technologies that could help alleviate the burden of labor costs for growers. We hope to see language from that bill make it into the Farm Bill.

As the cost of labor continues to weigh on our growers, we are looking at multiple angles to find solutions, and our technology suppliers are rising to the occasion.

Vineline *Charity News*

Ramon Murillo III Foundation's Kicks for Kids Project

This year's national convention featured a dedication to a member of our Watermelon Family that was lost before his time- Ramon Murillo III. Bringing the convention to Arizona for our first time gave us the opportunity to highlight the good work that the Murillo family has been doing in Ramon's memory since his passing. We highlighted the Ramon Murillo III Foundation in Scottsdale, but in this edition of the Vineline we'll tell you a little more of the story.



Kicks for Kids

As his brother Christian Murillo reflected at the National Convention, Ramon III was an avid sneaker collector, and in his memory the Ramon Murillo III Foundation started the impactful Kicks for Kids project. This initiative focuses on enriching the lives of children by supplying them with quality shoes. Donations made to the foundation directly contribute to the RM III Kicks 4 Kids project, enabling them to reach more youngsters and make a lasting difference.

The journey began with a golf tournament in 2022, where the community came together to honor Ramon Murillo III's memory. While the initial event covered costs and modest fundraising, it set the stage for what would become a transformative endeavor. The inaugural RM III Kicks event took place on October 27, 2023, benefiting over 150 children. Building on this success, the latest event held on March 19, 2024, extended support to an entire school of over 200 kids, ensuring each child received not only shoes, but also a pair of socks.

To date, the foundation has already touched the lives of hundreds of kids, with plans for many more. Future endeavors include building partnerships to provide sponsored socks, with a projected distribution of 1,000 pairs of shoes by the year's end. Additionally, upcoming events, including a back-to-school shoe distribution and a Christmas event, underscore the foundation's commitment to ongoing assistance.

Looking Ahead

The Ramon Murillo III Foundation remains steadfast in its mission to support children in need. With upcoming events planned, including another golf tournament and community-driven initiatives, the foundation continues to embody the spirit of generosity and compassion.

NWA stands alongside the foundation, recognizing the profound impact of their work and encouraging continued support for the Kicks for Kids project, all in memory of Ramon III.

For more information on how to contribute or get involved, visit ramonmurillo3foundation.square.site

Florida Report

Greetings from the Sunshine State of Florida!

From our Florida Watermelon Convention in October 2023 to National Watermelon Convention in February 2024, our 2023 Florida Watermelon Queen Alyssa along with our newly crowned 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen Elanie and I have been busy promoting Watermelons throughout these months.

Starting out with our Queen Alyssa being at the 18th Annual Seed Shoot. A sporting clay event to benefit the FSA/Scholarship Fund. It was a fun and beautiful day in Nokomis by all skeet shooters. Thank you, Chuck Elam for always inviting us to be a part of this wonderful event. Then Queen Alyssa ended her last promotion before Nationals at the 86th Annual Edison Festival of Lights Parade in Fort Myers. Thank you, Sawyer Smith with Wilbur Smith, Attorney at Law for sponsoring us and Madison Vogelbach for chaperone. A big thank you to Queen Alyssa for a job well done this past year as our 2023 Florida Watermelon Queen. We are all so proud of you and looking forward to see what your next adventures will be in life.

Meet our 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen Elanie Mason. She is the 23-year-old daughter of Billy and Muffet Mason of Parrish, Florida. She is currently attending the University of Florida where she a graduate student majoring in Agricultural Education and Communication. Elanie was the Florida FFA State Secretary, UF/IFAS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Ambassador, President of the Collegiate Farm Bureau, this year she was recognized as a Top 10 Senior of University of Florida College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. One of Elanie's favorite things is to cheer fervently for the Florida Gators! She enjoys supporting Florida football, gymnastics and baseball and can be found in one of the three stadiums/venues weekly from August to June. Elanie also enjoy making clay earrings for her small business and kayaking with friends and family.

Our newly crowned Queen Elanie is already on the road doing several promotions promoting Florida Watermelon Association this year from University of Florida Men's and Women's Basketball game, Florida Taste of Agriculture, Yara Mega Melon Event, IFAS Watermelon Day, Florida State Fair Opening Breakfast along with Governor's luncheon, to ended our month in February joining with Chef Justin along with the Fresh from Florida team at the Nascar Truck Race 250. Thank you to Chad Chastain for helping us out during that weekend in Daytona and to all of our sponsors for these events this past few months.

As our season is approaching us in the next few months. We would like to wish all of our watermelon farmers a successful and prosperous year. If you would like for Queen Elanie to attend any event, please reach out to me at (863) 633-8306 or email at debra@flfwa.com.

Remember to follow us on our Florida Watermelon Facebook, Instagram and our Website for all of recent promotions.

Until next time!!!!

Debra Harrison - Florida Watermelon Promotions Coordinator
 Cell: (863) 633-8306 Email: debra@flfwa.com



"Congratulations" to Scott Henderson for being one of the winners at the Seed Skeeet Shoot.



Queen Elanie visiting with Jeb Smith, President Florida Farm Bureau at the Florida State Capital in Tallahassee.



A beautiful day in Nokomis, Thanks Chuck Elam for all you do for our association.



Beautiful day at the Florida State Fair, Queen Elanie along with her beautiful mom Muffet Mason.



Queen Alyssa at the Edison Festival of Lights Parade.



Enjoyed seeing and visiting with Commissioner of Agriculture Wilton Simpson at the Opening Breakfast at the Florida State Fair.



Thank you Gibson Produce for purchasing that beautiful Kate Spade Watermelon Purse for Queen Alyssa at Nationals.



Our 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen Elanie Mason at our booth at the Florida State Fair!



Queen Alyssa enjoying spending time with Ellis Miller at the Fort McDowell Ranch in Scottsdale, Arizona.



a fun-filled event being at the University of Florida Men's Basketball game with John Tull- Senior Manager Business Development.



Congratulations to our newly crowned 2024 National Watermelon Queen Jules Singley.



Gator Mascot Albert and Queen Elanie at the University of Florida Men's Basketball game. Florida Gators 82 - LSU Tiger 80.



First Vice-President Carrie Thomas, 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen Elanie and I attended the IFAS Suwanee Valley Watermelon Institute in Fannie Springs, Fla.



Spending some time with Nascar Driver #1 Ross Chastain in Daytona with Chef Justin and Queen Elanie. Thank you, Ross, for all you do for our watermelon industry.



Enjoying visiting with Taylor and Marshall Sewell at the Yara Mega Melon Event, Thanks Taylor for inviting me.



At the "Winner Circle" in Daytona with Chef Justin and the Fresh from Florida staff. Congratulations goes out to #2 Nick Sanchez for winning the Craftsman Truck 250 Race.

Georgia Report

Greetings from Georgia!

The Georgia Watermelon Association is proud to report on a successful annual conference in St. Simons this year. The King & Prince Beach and Golf Resort was the setting and host hotel for all activities throughout the weekend. The GWA is excited to be hosting the 2025 GWA Convention at Chateau Elan, an award-winning winery and culinary destination located in the rolling foothills of North Georgia!

The 2024 GWA Annual Convention had a great attendance this year with 275 growers and watermelon agribusinesses who joined us for the weekend. The live auction was a great success raising over \$330,000. A BIG THANKS to our lead donors, buyers, and other auction supporters for this 2024 event. This association will thrive due to your support and passion for the industry and we're excited about the upcoming year. Also, thanks for the support given by our CORPORATE sponsors for the meeting. It would not have been possible without your generous donations.

Congratulations to our 2024 Georgia Watermelon Brand Ambassador, Miss Maycey Kight! Maycey is from Moultrie, Georgia and is attending Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, majoring in Agriculture, with a concentration in Crop and Soil Science. When Maycey is not attending classes, she is employed part time with Clifton Seed. Her duties include packing and delivering seed orders to growers and assisting in field trials. Maycey has already begun her year of promoting watermelon at schools, retail locations, and Meet and Greet at the Food City Store with Ross Chastain! Thank you to Melon 1 for sponsoring Maycey on this promotion to help kick off the NASCAR race in Bristol Tennessee! Maycey looks forward to Ambassador Training with the NWPB, farm visits, Georgia Food + Wine Festival, and many other events throughout the spring and summer months. Be sure to follow Maycey on Instagram @gawatermelonambassador! If you are interested in scheduling the GWA Brand Ambassador, please call ahead to schedule a date for our 2024 tour by contacting Dawn Cheplick at 706-845-8575 or dcheplick@asginfo.net.

Looking forward to seeing you all this summer!

Sincerely,
 Dawn Cheplick, Promotions Coordinator
 706-845-8575
 dcheplick@asginfo.net



Maycey Kight receives the newly appointed position of 2024 GWA Brand Ambassador



Hanging with Ross Chastain at the Food City store in Blountville TN to help promote #useyourmelon and Don't Drink and Drive.



First time visit for Maycey to visit the magnificent Biltmore Estates!



Watermelon was a big hit with Sumter County Elementary students!



Tri Cities Tennessee and Food City Store visit in preparation for the Food City 500.



Show us your 'W'!



Maycey handed out over 900 slices of watermelon at Science on the Farm Day to Sumter County Elementary scholars.



Making memories at the Biltmore!

Gulf Coast Report

What a great beginning to the year!

The Gulf Coast Watermelon Association just completed our 2024 Convention. Our outgoing president, Trey Smith of T. Smith Farms, hosted a wonderful convention. We are excited to welcome our incoming president, Allen Eubanks of Eubanks Produce. The weekend was filled with our watermelon friends and family. Our 2025 Gulf Coast Watermelon Convention will be held January 31 - February 1, 2025, at the Beau Rivage Resort and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi.

We are very proud of our 2023 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen, Julianna Singley for being crowned the 2024 National Watermelon Queen. She did a lovely job representing our association. We are confident she will also represent the National Association with as much grace and poise throughout her reign as did as the 2023 GCWA Queen.

Congratulations to our newly crowned 2024 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen, Tori Hobbs of Wicksburg, Alabama. Tori is a junior at Troy University studying Exercise Science, Pre Health. We are happy to welcome her to our watermelon family!

Tori attended her first watermelon promotion at Hillcrest Elementary School and Holly Hill Elementary School in Enterprise, Alabama for Read Across America Week. She is looking forward to attending Queen Training hosted by the National Watermelon Promotion Board. Looking ahead into the year, Queen Tori will be visiting festivals, farm stands, schools, farm tours, and much more.

Would you like to book the Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen? Please email Sarah Jane at gulfcoastwatermelonqueen@gmail.com to schedule a promotion. Queen Tori can hardly wait for her busy year as the 2024 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen!

Be sure to check out and keep up with our queen on the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Facebook and Instagram pages to see all of our watermelon promotions. We wish everyone a successful watermelon season!

Many Blessings,

Sarah Jane Levine

Gulf Coast Watermelon
 Association Promotion Coordinator
 (337) 348-4465
gulfcoastwatermelonqueen@gmail.com



Illiana Report

Greetings from Illiana!

Preparations are underway for what we hope will be a prosperous growing season in Indiana and Illinois!

The time has come for Queen Abby to give up her crown and we are so proud of the way she has served our association. Abby shared her passion for the industry with the judges at the National Watermelon Association convention in Scottsdale, Arizona, and represented us with grace the entire weekend. Thank you, Abby, for an amazing year. We know you will do great things!

Our 34th annual convention took place in January at the beautiful French Lick Resort in French Lick, Indiana with record-breaking attendance! It was a wonderful weekend filled with good food, great friends, and fun. On Saturday evening Cody Smith passed on the gavel to new President Rob Beets of Murphysboro, Tennessee. We also welcomed Chelsey Cardinal as 2nd Vice President, Madison Niehaus as Secretary, and two new board members, Jennifer Jones and Rich Chatin. Lastly, we crowned our new 2024 Illiana Watermelon Queen, Miss Maya Snider of Terre Haute, Indiana. Queen Maya is a junior at Indiana State University where she is studying Pre-Medicine. She now shares the title of Watermelon Queen with her mother, Stephanie Rees Snider, our 1994 queen!

Of course, our convention could not go on without the help of our wonderful sponsors. A huge THANK YOU to our platinum sponsors, International Paper, Knox County Farm Bureau, Valencia Harvesting, Premier Melon, Mouzin Brothers, Frey Farms, Seedway, Superior Ag, Global Produce Sales, CoorChoice, and SummerTime Produce.

We look forward to a wonderful growing season!

Kind Regards,
Lana Brothers
(314)724-6305
iwapromocoordinator@gmail.com



Thank you, Abby, for a great year



Hello, Scottsdale!



Welcome reception



Spirit wear ready at the NWA convention



Introducing the 2024 Illiana Watermelon Queen, Miss Maya Snider

2024 Convention Sponsors



2023 AUCTION LOAD BUYERS



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Congratulations Maya!

Mar-del Report

They always say time flies when you are having fun. We can not believe the watermelon season is quickly approaching once again! Our 2023 promotion year was a success! Queen Brielle was able to represent the Mar- Del Watermelon Association at a couple end of year promotions. She attended the Maryland Agriculture dinner. It is always rewarding to see the strong presence of the Department of Agriculture in both Maryland and Delaware.

Mar-Del Watermelon Association kicked off their annual convention weekend with a Watermelon's in the Winner Circle theme! It was a successful weekend and a good time was had by all! We wished Queen Brielle the best of luck at Nationals and thanked her for doing a wonderful job as the 2023 Mar-Del Watermelon Queen. Brielle did her last walk as the Mar-Del Queen before crowning our 2024 Mar-Del Watermelon Queen, Miss Karli Abbott.

We are excited to announce our 2023 Mar-Del Watermelon Queen Miss Karli Abbott. Karli is a junior at University of Maryland Baltimore County, Environmental Science and Education major. Pursuing a career in policy development and advocacy. .We can not wait to see what the 2023 promotion year holds for Brielle.



Queen Brielle enjoying the beautiful sites in Scottsdale, Arizona.



Queen Brielle at the Maryland Ag dinner.



Queen Brielle and coordinator Terra before promotion wear.



Queen Brielle and newly crowned Queen Karli Abbott.



Queen Brielle with our 4 contestants at the Mar-Del Watermelon Convention.



Queen Brielle and her supportive family at the National Watermelon Convention.



Queen Brielle and members of the Mar-Del Watermelon Association. No words for how proud we are for Brielle receiving the honor of First Runner-Up.

North Carolina Report

What a fun and busy year it has been for our 2023 North Carolina Watermelon Queen Miss Gracy Peterson. Gracy was the perfect watermelon ambassador and we would like to thank her for her dedication this season. Before heading out to Arizona, Gracy enjoyed attending a couple of other state conventions this winter. Thank you to the South Carolina and Mar-Del Watermelon Associations for their hospitality.

Gracy had a wonderful trip to the NWA Convention in Scottsdale, Arizona. She was a fantastic representative for the NC Watermelon Association and its members throughout all the convention events. While in Arizona, Gracy and the other state queens enjoyed a pink jeep tour of Sedona's red rock mountains and we even made a quick trip to Old Town for a little exploring. Thank you to the National Watermelon Association for hosting a great convention in such a unique location. We just completed the 41st Annual North Carolina Watermelon Association Convention in Wrightsville Beach, NC. We hosted eight young ladies, who competed for the title of 2024 North Carolina Watermelon Queen. It was a great competition with each contestant having a unique perspective on how they could best promote North Carolina watermelons. Our judges certainly had to make some tough decisions. During the evening banquet, Miss Haylee Davis was selected as the 2024 North Carolina Watermelon Queen. Haylee is a student at North Carolina State University majoring in agriculture education with a concentration in horticulture sciences. As an active FFA member in high school Haylee developed her love of advocating for the agriculture industry and she is excited to represent the North Carolina Watermelon Association this year. We also had the opportunity to say farewell to our 2023 NC Watermelon Queen Miss Gracy Peterson at our convention. Gracy received a standing ovation from our membership for her year of service. A few other highlights of our convention included a fun President's reception, an action packed seed spit contest and a very successful auction. Thank you to all the generous sponsors who made the convention so great.

We are looking forward to kicking off Haylee's busy spring schedule. Wishing you all a successful season.

Sharon Rogers
 Promotions Coordinator 336-583-9630
 ncwatermelonqueen@gmail.com



Queen Gracy with sister Queens and contestants at the South Carolina Watermelon Convention auction.



Queen Gracy and the 2024 NC Watermelon Queen contestants



Queen Gracy and friends having a little fun at the MarDel Watermelon Association Convention.



Mr. Joe Jones and Queen Gracy at the NCWA Auction.



Pink Jeep Tour stop in Sedona, AZ



Cornhole boards made by Queen Gracy for the NCWA Auction



Fort Mc Dowell Adventures was a wonderful location for the Thursday night opening reception at the NWA Convention



NC Watermelon Association seed spit contest winners: Arnold Lynch, Gracy Peterson, Sue Colucci and Coralyn Beasley



Queens Gracy thanking members of the NC Watermelon Association for purchasing her a necklace at the NWA Auction.



NC Watermelon Association 2024 Watermelon Queen Scholarship Pageant winners: Rhylee Pope – 2nd runner up, Haylee Davis – Queen, Bliss Pointer – 1st runner up



All the Queens are ready for the auction and seed spit at NWA



Queen Haylee and her new fan club!



North Carolina Watermelon Association members congratulating Queen Gracy at the NWA Banquet.



Past North Carolina Watermelon Queen's with Queen Haylee



NCWA President Frank Howell receiving a plaque from the NC Bee Keepers Association for their support of an endowed professorship in apiculture at NC State University



NC Watermelon Association Executive Director – Cathy Price Horton being recognized for 25 Years of Service to the NCWA

South Carolina Report

Another watermelon season is fast approaching. With this new year, we would like to welcome the new 2024 SC Watermelon Queen, Kinlyn Hinson. Kinlyn has hit the ground in a fast run and this looks like it may be the busiest year yet for SC watermelons.

Kinlyn was crowned on January 20th, in Hilton Head, SC. The SC convention proved to be one of our best and the auction was a huge success. Many thanks to all of our supporters and we wish to have many more years with all of you in the future.

Kinlyn's first trip was to the Gulf Coast Convention in Biloxi, MS. As usual, it was a great convention with great people and many wonderful memories were made for our new queen. The second trip was to the North Carolina Convention in Wrightsville Beach, NC, and Kinlyn meet many new faces in our industry and had a very productive weekend.

On March 17th, Kinlyn rode in the Blowfish Shamrock Parade in Lexington, SC. This was one of many parades that Kinlyn will participate in this year. Many thanks to the Blowfish Baseball Team and our continued alliance with them.

We will be headed to Myrtle Beach, SC, to the FFA Camp on Friday, March 22nd, for the first of six speaking and cutting engagements with the Future Farmers of America program. We are very excited about this new collaboration and hope that we can continue in future years.

The SCWA will be hosting all of the state queens and coordinators on April 4-7, 2024, in Charleston, SC, for the Cooper River Bridge Run. This event brings in over 30,000 runners and 65,000 pounds of cut and processed melons are distributed to the runners and spectators. We sincerely appreciated the help and support of our fellow queens and coordinators for this event.

There will be another FFA Camp on April 12th, and Queen Training will follow on April 18-21, in Orlando, Fl. Events continue to come in almost daily and Kinlyn is working hard to put her best foot forward for the SCWA.

Sweet Watermelon Wishes,

Ann Bryant
 SC Promotions Coordinator
 Abryant028@charter.net
 864-303-3995



New SC Watermelon Queen, Kinlyn Hinson and her mother, Chrystal Hinson.



Jesse Wiggins making Kinlyn feel welcome.



Queen Kinlyn and her court.



New Gulfcoast Queen, Tori Hobbs and Kinlyn.



The SC Has Beens.



Wrightsville Beach, NC, and the NCWA Convention.



SC Watermelon Board and 2024 Queen.



NC Convention.



Biloxi and the Gulf Coast Convention.



New NC Queen, Haylee Davis and Kinlyn.



What beautiful scenery in Biloxi.



A fun day at the Blowfish Shamrock Parade in Lexington, SC.

Texas Report

Hello to all our watermelon family. I hope you and yours are well and your coming year will be a great one.

Unfortunately, we did not end up attending the National Watermelon Convention as our 2023 queen, Savannah, decided to focus on school. She did her best to represent our association well and we wish her the best. Thank you, Savannah, for being a great sport through the difficulties in traveling and for being a hard worker, and a lovely person.

Our 2024 Texas Watermelon Queen, Miss Amelia Dineen and I got to take our first trip together to the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association in February, and we had a great time. The Beau Rivage in Biloxi, Mississippi was a beautiful hotel and the folks in the Gulf Coast Association were wonderful. Amelia attended the president's reception which was a Mardi Gras theme and she got to know some of the other state queens and members of the association. The next morning we watched the contestants' speeches and promotion wear then we had a little time to get pictures outside. Later we went on to the seed spit contest and the auction. That evening there was a wonderful dinner and of course, the crowning of the new 2024 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen, Miss Tori Hobbs. Amelia and I look forward to getting to know Tori, and we wish her all the best in the coming year.

Soon Amelia and I will travel to South Carolina for the Cooper River Bridge Run, then we will attend the Viva Fresh Expo in Houston, and after that we will have queen training in Orlando. We will be looking to do in-store promotions and other events soon.

May God bless you with a wonderful crop and market in 2024, and may you and your families be blessed.

Best regards,
 Barbara Duda
 TWA Coordinator
 Bcduda62@gmail.com



These beauties are ready for the Gulf Coast president's reception.



Mr. Jesse Wiggins with the lovely queens



Amelia is ready to enjoy the events at the Beau Rivage.



Mr. Chuck Elam with Kinlyn Hinson, Olivia Johnson, Juliana Singley, and Amelia



Getting better at the seed spit



South Carolina Queen Kinlyn Hinson, National Watermelon Queen, Olivia Johnson and Texas Queen, Amelia Dineen



Helping with the GCWA auction



Amelia congratulates the new 2024 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen, Miss Tori Hobbs.

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